

## **Playing Text: Strategies for Teaching Games**

**BFI Media Conference 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

### **Notes to accompany PowerPoint**

#### **Chucklefish case study**

Chucklefish are an independent games studio based in London, UK. They develop and publish their own IP, and provide support to other amazing developers.

When Finn founded Chucklefish in 2011, they were just a handful of developers spread across the globe – with colleagues in Europe, Australia and the United States. Working remotely encouraged us to be highly supportive of each other and strengthened our sense of a common goal.

After the initial popularity of Starbound, the team relocated to London in 2014.

Since then, we have grown into a family with a wonderful culture of creativity and community. Chucklefish has expanded a lot in the past couple of years, but remains entirely self-funded and independent.

In an effort to support the independent games industry, we offer advice and support to indie devs in areas where they lack knowledge or resources. Support often includes; technical and creative development, legal, marketing, PR and sales.

Key game that has been developed is Starbound

***Starbound is a 2D multiplayer extraterrestrial sandbox adventure game.***

***In Starbound, you create your own story - there's no wrong way to play!***

You may choose to save the universe from the forces that destroyed your home, uncovering greater galactic mysteries in the process, or you could forego a heroic journey entirely in favour of colonising uncharted planets.

Settle down and farm the land, become an intergalactic landlord, hop from planet to planet capturing rare creatures, or delve into dangerous dungeons and lay claim to extraordinary treasures.

Discover ancient temples and modern metropolises, trees with eyes and mischievous penguins. Make use of hundreds of materials and over two thousand objects to build a sleepy secluded cabin in the woods, a medieval castle, or an underwater arcade.

***Starbound has been built from the ground up to be multiplayer and easily moddable. You have the tools to make the universe your own and modify the game to suit your play style - add new races, biomes, dungeons, and quests - the possibilities are limitless.***

## The Success of Starbound

Starbound development began in 2011. In April 2013, we hosted a crowdfunding campaign through our website and received an overwhelming amount of support from our community.

### There are seven playable races in the game:

**Apex** are ape-like creatures with naturally humanoid features. Due to a process that Apex researchers discovered, they are able to upgrade their intellectual state while degrading their physical state. There is much dissent among them, as individuals chosen for researching a better process never return.

**Avians** are bird-like creatures without wings. They believe that their wings were lost upon entrance into the mortal world from the "Aether", or their "Plane of Gods". They believe that they will regain their wings upon entrance into the "Aether", which they believe is achieved only by complete theological devotion. Non-worshippers are called "The Grounded".

**Florans** are carnivorous plant creatures. They have a peaceful appearance but are highly violent, engaging in wars with other factions of their race. At one point, they managed to conquer another race's world. They are exceptional at reverse engineering technology. It is not known if this capability has an effect on gameplay.

**Humans** are ordinary Humans. In time, Humans on Earth grew to create a single Human empire. Humans gained the ability of complete space travel at one point. Earth was a place of peace and enlightenment for many years. However, a meteor containing a hostile tentacle alien race had crash-landed on Earth. It grew to the point of destroying Earth's cities, and scattered the Human race into the universe.

**Hylotl** are an amphibious species. They are the most docile race after living under the sea for many years, eventually developing empathy toward all living races. Their strong obsession with beauty seems to be their driving notion. With their empathy for all living creatures, the Hylotl send out members of their race as missionaries to spread peace. The Hylotl were eventually driven off-world by the Florans. Although they are docile, they are very proficient in the use of weaponry. Hylotl culture appears to resemble that of feudal Japan.

**The Glitch** are robotic creatures with their mindsets stuck in the Medieval Age. The Glitch were created by an unknown race, and they are controlled by a single hivemind; their entire purpose is to build, expand, and evolve. Inevitably, they learned that they are artificial constructs when they deconstructed themselves, realizing that their inside contents were nothing more than mechanical parts. Their understanding of the world leads them to realize that artificial things have a creator. This gave them the ability of self-awareness; some Glitch accept their role as workers while others pursue the truth.

**The Novakid** are beings made out of solar energy. As the Novakids have little to no desire to record their history, little is known about their origins and any groundbreaking research is forgotten within a few generations. This race was announced when the pre-order campaign raised \$500,000, and was planned to be added after the full release, but ended up being added in the later beta update, v. Upbeat Giraffe.

## Look of the game – 2D pixel art

Steampunk aesthetic and intertextual references to wide variety of games and other pop culture

It is a procedurally generated game - In computing, **procedural generation** is a method of creating data algorithmically as opposed to manually. In computer graphics it is commonly used to create textures and 3D models. In video games it is used to create large amounts of content in a game. Advantages of procedural generation include smaller file sizes, larger amounts of content, and randomness for less predictable gameplay.

**Steam** – Entertainment platform for computers, mobile and TV

Wide variety of titles

## Community

In December 2013, Starbound entered Early Access on Steam. Within three months, we had sold over one million copies. As of February 2016, we've now sold more than two million copies!

Since beta launch, Starbound has sold at a steady pace and has popped up on the Steam Top Sellers List as well as the Top Ten most played games on the platform, with concurrent players peaking at 88,000 during launch and 40,000 after large content updates.

They have built an extremely passionate community, with over 150,000 active users on their official forums, 50,000 subscribers to their subreddit, and over 80 million page views on our official wiki.

Minecraft style audience – move beyond that.

Twitch – rise of gaming as a spectator sport. Sense of community. E-sports Last week, it was confirmed that Sky and ITV had joined forces with Ginx TV to bring you the best of eSports with the UK and Ireland's first and only 24-hour eSports TV channel.

**Stardew Valley** is a great case study for this because we were able to stream and show off the game on our channels to very large audiences before the game's launch, which created a ripple effect of hype for the game which translated directly into sales, selling roughly a million copies in the first month.

The game itself is absolutely brilliant and all it needed was visibility to take off. We didn't have a hand in its development, it was all one person - Eric Barone (concernedape) who taught himself the skills he needed on the job, it took him nearly 7 years to complete the game to a standard he is happy with. Next in store for Stardew Valley is localisation and porting to consoles which was announced recently at E3 <http://stardewvalley.net/stardew-valley-coming-to-consoles-q4-2016/>

## Useful links

- <http://gamestudies.org/1502> - Academic Journal on games
- <https://mitpress.mit.edu/category/discipline/game-studies> - MIT publishing
- <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/series/playful-thinking-series> - Accessible texts on variety of games issues
- <http://indiegames.com/index.html>
- <http://gamejolt.com/> - Indie games community
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gqK7L2D9eI> - Link to Q&A of Starbound team at the Norwich Games Festival